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From: Seneca, Roy
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No chemical reached river in Freedom cleanup accident Thursday

By Ken Ward Jr.

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Crews at the Freedom Industries tank farm along the Elk River hit an underground pipe last night, releasing more of the chemical Crude MCHM and prompting another strong licorice odor in the surrounding area.

None of the chemical that spilled ended up in the Elk River, officials said this afternoon.

The incident occurred at about 6 p.m., said Mike Dorsey, director of emergency response and homeland security for the state Department of Environmental Protection.

"It wasn't so much of an incident," Dorsey said. "None of the stuff got into the river."

Dorsey said whatever Crude MCHM was released was held within a "cutoff trench" crews dug to try to block any contaminated material from the site from leaching into the river.

According to Dorsey, the incident occurred when cleanup crews were using an excavator to enlarge the cutoff trench. He said they hit an underground pipe that they didn't know was there.

It's not exactly clear what the pipe was for, and the pipe apparently wasn't marked on plans for the site, Dorsey said.

"It's kind of like a lot of the piping up there," Dorsey said. "It's got some groundwater in it. We don't know where it is coming from."

Dorsey characterized the amount of Crude MCHM that was involved as "a trickle."

"It was tens of gallons, not hundreds or thousands of gallons," Dorsey said.

Still, the leak produced an odor that led to at least four odor complaints from residents, Dorsey said.